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ABSTRACT

An emphasis in college level social sciences on the principles of the Declaration of Independence can provide a foundation for interdisciplinary study as well as illuminate political issues, institutions, and ends. For example, in terms of the Declaration, political science is the study of the ends of political life (security of human rights) and the means to attain them. Economics is subordinate to the higher art of politics, providing a necessary, but not sufficient condition for human happiness. History is perceived as the struggle of people against unnatural regimes which stifled their rights and the attempts to remedy these conditions. The Declaration humanized psychology by accounting for basic drives not as subhuman forces, but as the impetus of the human being toward happiness. In addition, political issues can be analyzed in terms of the Declaration. The separation of powers, development of political parties, functions of the news media, foreign policy, and national defense all emanate from it. On the other hand, the comprehensive approach to social welfare is a measure of society's falling away from its fundamental principles. In conclusion, a return to the genuine study of political life, the quest for purpose in the social sciences, and the discovery of the place of political institutions, policies, and ends will result in the antidote for instructor apathy and mark a resurgence in the appreciation of the academic life. (KC)

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NOTES ON A RETURN TO THE GENUINE STUDY OF THE ISSUES OF POLITICAL LIFE

Or:

STEPS TOWARD OVERCOMING INSTRUCTOR APATHY AND THE MALAISE OF THE LISTLESS COLLEGES

By Richard H. Reeb, Jr.

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The problem of instructor apathy, especially in the social sciences, while hardly of recent origin, has, if the theme of this conference is any indication, reached the level of a crisis. The problem has at least two, perhaps three sources. First, there is the crisis of the learned disciplines, brought on by the academic equivalent of talking oneself out of a job. It has been fashionable for several decades now to reduce the principles of the public regime, the presumed subject matter of the social sciences, to the allegedly more fundamental private drives and interests which are said to move public men. In reducing the political to the subpolitical, we have deprived political life of any meaning or significance (not to mention dignity). In this view, if we would truly understand the epiphenomenal realm of politics, we would be best advised to study physics. Then the "matter in motion" (that only <u>looks</u> like human beings disputing with each other over the fair and just distribution of the goods of political life, seeking to achieve justice in human life) could be understood free of all biases or values. More than a few of our students have drawn the appropriate conclusion from this teaching and have turned to science and mathematics. But we, too, have drawn certain conclusions and have little conviction about the worth of our discipline for ourselves as well as for our students.

Second, there is the decline of standards in the academic community. Our badly kept "dirty little secret" is that knowledge is rarely sought for its own sake, or for the sake of its uplifting effect on those who

learn, on students, but for its practical, especially monetary, value for career-conscious young men and women. The world of the philistine, never far away or wholly absent, threatens to engulf the academic community. The social sciences seem hopelessly unprepared for this onslaught, for they have long since abandoned any notion of teaching students about, or sustaining its teachers by, the virtues of good citizenship or of good character. These are mere values, intrinsically no better than hedonistic or superstitious or criminal values. We teach only facts which students are free to use for any purpose their allegedly unique "selfs" may conceive of.

Third, we must take account of the growing egalitarianism of the regime itself. Democracy is always prone to the corruption that liberty consists in doing as one likes and that justice demands equal things for persons of unequal merit. Programs of affirmative action, income redistribution, and support of "alternative lifestyles"--strongly supported, if not actively fostered in the academic community--have "returned to plague the inventor." If the life of the mind, or the pursuit of justice, are not regarded by the regime as worthy of pursuit, than the likelihood of persuading our students, who are citizens of that egalitarian regime, of the value of such lives is very remote. This cannot help but engender instructor apathy.

I submit the way to overcome instructor apathy, or at least to begin the journey, the long journey, that will bring us to where we look upon our tasks with more enthusiasm, is what I call the return to the genuine study of the regime, of political life. But to what do we turn for clarity about political life? And what is necessary for the reinvigoration of academic life, a life once believed to be one that transcends

political life?

For both, it is suggested we turn to the Declaration of Independence, the principles of which constitute the ends of political life and the means by which we may go beyond political life to the situation of man as man. In so doing, we will suggest ways to clarify several of the issues of social science and of political life and to point to a way of life which is not itself political: the academic life. The latter always remains aware of the limits both of political life and of its own capacity for affecting political life.

The Declaration of Independence is the first political document in the history of the world to proclaim, as a matter of first principles, that all men are created equal, that they all possess natural rights, that governments are formed to secure those rights by the consent of the governed, and that the people possess a right of revolution against oppressive government. All human beings are part of the order of creation and are governed by the laws of nature and of nature's God. The order and laws are the ground for an objective view of the world. The fundamental propositions of the Declaration are regarded as self-evident truths. As such, these propositions are always and everywhere true, depending on neither time nor place (not to mention universal assent).

What does it mean to say that all men are created equal? The clearest indication comes immediately afterwards: all men have equal rights to, among other things, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Beings that have such rights do so in accordance with their natural capacities. The central right is, moreover, most expressive of them: liberty. Human beings are characterized by their freedom to deliberate and choose, to make the choices that are necessary to sustain their lives

and to obtain that end for he sake of which they live: happiness. The pursuit of happiness is peculiar to human beings, for in the hierarchy of nature assumed by the Declaration, there are higher and lower beings for which such pursuit is either unnecessary or impossible. That is, the Creator, the Source of all human rights, is in a state of perfection for Whom the pursuit of happiness would be superfluous. A Perfect Being need not pursue what He already has in fullest measure. On the other hand, beings of a lower order than human beings cannot pursue happiness because they lack the moral and intellectual equipment necessary for the task.

What are the uniquely human qualities which make us the only beings who can and must pursue happiness? Evidently, we are beings who, by nature, have the capacity for understanding the laws of nature and of nature's God. That is, we are beings who can, through reason, determine how best to live. (Although these truths are self evident, they must first be discovered by reason.) Such rational beings are capable of governing themselves. Indeed, the governments that are established among men must derive their powers from the consent of all who have agreed to be governed and may be changed if those same persons deem it necessary for the security of their natural rights. Persons who can govern themselves are also capable of performing whatever tasks may contribute to good government. They may also inquire into all issues which concern man as man. In short, according to the Declaration, man is by nature capable of self government and open to the quest for knowledge which transcends politics.

On the basis of the Declaration, I believe I can suggest a new--indeed, a radical--approach to the social sciences. Each of the disciplines can be ordered to a common end and made more harmonious with

each other. Following this, I would like to suggest how a number of issues of political life can be more fruitfully studied and understood by reference to the Declaration.

Let me begin with the field of political science. This discipline is, today, largely concerned with understanding relationships of power, rule and authority, the authoritative allocation of values, and safeguarding the self against the intervention of the modern state in the self's private affairs. But according to the Declaration, political science is the study of the ends of political life--primarily security of human rights--and of the means necessary to attain them. Whereas contemporary political science looks upon politics as alien and pernicious to the self, the Declaration sees politics as the natural extension of the interests of human beings. While hardly free of dangers, politics is the only practical (and, in the best case, the most ennobling) means of self government.

Economics today is the study of the means by which individual selves (buyers and sellers) acquire the material objects which bring them physical and emotional gratification. The Declaration of Independence sees economics as subordinate to the higher art of politics in that the former supplies the needs of the body and the latter. in addition, opens the prospect of fulfilling our higher nature, viz., the pursuit of fame and glory, but also the perfection of our moral and intellectual faculties. The solution to the economic problem provides only a necessary, but not the sufficient, condition for human happiness.

Contemporary psychology is the study of the fundamental drives in human beings leading to man's estrangement from society and civilization. The Declaration of Independence humanizes psychology by accounting for

the basic drives not as elemental subhuman forces, but as the impetus of the human being toward happiness. While looking first to the lowest and easiest pursuits available, man ultimately grasps the laws of nature and of nature's God and sees the purpose of human life as living in accordance with nature. An informed psychology would rank the drives which move human beings according to whether or to what extent they were directed toward the human excellence which provides the model or standard for all.

Sociology today is the study of the dynamics of society as distinguished from the state and, more recently, from the individual. The Declaration of Independence makes only a formal distinction between society and state, with the latter being simply the means by which the ends of the former are secured. Indeed, government is the only security for the individual members of society. Society is, moreover, a reflection of the characters of the human beings present over time in a particular place. As such, it constitutes a civilizing force to the extent that the leading members of that society, the molders and shapers of opinions and habits, are governed within themselves by the knowledge of human nature.

Anthropology is the study of culture, which is alleged to be the primary condition of man, with no culture distinguished from any other culture except in terms of viability but certainly not of goodness. The Declaration understands culture in terms of the freedom of human beings to grasp their situation as it is, that is, to see the ground of their being in the knowledge of nature. The most cultured society, then, is one which is informed by natural right, by the influence of the discoveries of the most cultured human beings.

The most recent of the social science disciplines, ethnic studies, is the study of ethnicity as the fundamental determinant of human action and institutions. There are said to be ethnic points of view which are fundamentally irreconcilable, with no law between them except force. This is but another name for racism or, as used to be said with derision, ethnocentrism. The Declaration recognizes no claims of ethnicity. Primarily, all men are created equal and, secondarily, they are distinguished in terms of their capacity for understanding nature and implementing its demands. Race, color, age and sex are by no means trivial, but they are ultimately subordinate to the higher law of human nature. There are no rights of race or sex, of color or age.

Perhaps the most venerable of the social science disciplines is history, which is the study of human action over time. It was once said that history was the source of lessons for men and women of the present for the better ordering of their future affairs, but it is now reduced either to a dreary catalogue of names, dates and places, or an arbitrary arrangement of facts according to one's ideological preferences. The Declaration, on the other hand, sees history as the struggle of men against unnatural regimes which stifled their rights and attempts to remedy this condition by the establishment of free regimes. The long view of human history is not "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," but the searching for and discovery of what is most human in man, which is his desire to attain his natural end, to develop his reason.

Our practical conclusion is that the principles of the Declaration of Independence provide the foundation for truly interdisciplinary study. I would like now to turn to how the Declaration of Independence can reform

the study of the regime itself. I have selected eight topics which will illustrate the value of the Declaration for illuminating political issues, institutions and ends.

Most political science texts avoid discussion of the Declaration of Independence itself on the grounds that it was a product of the unenlightened world of the 18th century or a statement of ideals which have been ignored by a racist, reactionary, oppressive or oligarchic regime. In any case, it is implied that the Declaration provides no theme for American government. However, the Declaration proclaims the ends by which men are guided in their own conduct and in the management of their public affairs. All of the important principles and many of the institutional arrangements (though not, of course, the minute details) of the American regime can be ascertained or deduced from the Declaration. The separation of powers, an independent judiciary, trial by jury, civilian control of the military, the right of emigration, the right to vote and even federalism are either advocated or assumed to be necessary for the right or just political order. Above all, the Declaration is the standard for the evaluation of all political orders, including of course, the American one, and all parts thereof. This can be seen from what follows.

The establishment of the national government (otherwise known as the federal government) in 1789 is widely regarded as a departure from the ideals of the Declaration or a plot of scheming oligarchs to thwart democarcy. But it is more accurate to take seriously the claims of the constitutional framers themselves that they wished to make the democratic principles of the Declaration effective for the entire American nation by strengthening the central government, promoting commerce and securing liberty. This constitution did not enable the rich to oppress the poor

but enabled all groups which accept the principles of the regime to pursue ends which are not incompatible with the pursuit by others of their legitimate ends or with the continued existence of the regime.

The separation of powers in the national government is designed to check the abuse of political power while strengthening the regime's capacity for preserving and extending its principles. That is, tyranny by the government or by the majority is rendered highly unlikely by institutional checks and balances; but deliberation by Congress, leadership by the President, and jurisprudence by the Supreme Court were intended as the positive fruits of the negative restraints on government. The intent is to deadlock government only when it is inclined to act badly or unjustly, while facilitating its capacity to perform its proper tasks.

Political parties, while probably not planned by the founders of the regime--at least not in the form they have assumed--have developed in accordance with the ends of the Declaration and have structured themselves in accordance with the institutional features established by the Constitution. The leading partisans have sought to lead public opinion toward the requirements of right but have been obliged to operate in and through a large commercial republic with separation of powers, federalism and a dynamic and fluid society with no permanent class distinctions. Winning elections, presenting alternatives, recruiting leadership, mobilizing the electorate and so on are the functions of parties which are necessary and intelligible only by reference to the ends and means of American politics. The parties exist not in the vacuum of many, various and irreconcilable interests, but within the framework of purpose and procedure.

The news media are the instruments for political education which

supplement and extend the human voice in a large, democratic society. As such, they both articulate and disseminate the rhetoric and proposals of statesmen and the opinions and interests of citizens. If the media are watchdogs, gatekeepers or adversaries to the government, they are only justified in being such in the light of the regime's commitment to fulfilling its ends or safeguarding the means by which it pursues those ends. In the best case, the media are not neutral observers or non-partisan commentators but custodians of republican principles and institutions who report on or comment about human affairs in order to facilitate the good government of the country.

Foreign policy and national defense are pursued for essentially two reasons: the security of the regime and the perpetuation and, where possible, the extension of its principles in the world. American government, in common with every other legitimate government, has the right to self defense and to maintain its own existence. But by virtue of its unique and singular custodianship since 1776 of "the sacred fires of republican liberty," the United States has the obligation to uphold, by speech and by deed, those republican principles in the world. The regime arms itself, forms alliances, fosters trade, negotiates treaties, conducts diplomacy, wages war and so on with a view to promoting the most republican good in the international circumstances.

That the U.S. has committed itself to an extensive, expensive and comprehensive policy of social welfare in the 20th century is itself a measure of the regime's falling away from its fundamental principles. According to the Declaration, each human being, unless he lacks the necessary moral and intellectual equipment, is responsible for himself. The government does not guarantee happiness but secures the rights to life

and liberty which enable men to pursue happiness. The original commitment to what is today called social welfare was necessarily small from moral and political conviction, not for lack of resources or because of mean spiritedness. The regime stands for equality of opportunity, not equality of results.

Finally, there is no public policy which better exemplifies the character and significance of the American regime than its fundamental commitment to civil and religious liberty. But in the 20th century, the delusion has been indulged that this can be an open-ended regime, with liberty as a means to any end imaginable, rather than the means for promoting or deliberating about the common good. Of course, the commitment to liberty was originally accompanied by an equal commitment to the regime which is characteristically faithful to that end. Our principles encourage the public participation of all who wish to contribute to the task of <u>how</u> to secure our liberty but not <u>whether</u> to secure it. We are in principle closed to the adoption or implementation of anti-republican principles, especially those of Communism or Nazism, but also of monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy or "pure" or plebiscitary democracy. There is no right to destroy liberty, but there <u>is</u> a duty in democratic society to maintain the regime of liberty.

The Declaration of Independence, then, sets forth comprehensive and architectonic principles for political life. However, social scientists might, of course, dismiss most, if not all, of the foregoing remarks as unscientific, as the prescription of normative, as distinguished from descriptive or empirical, principles of analysis. Or perhaps they would concede that each individual posits values which are of importance to him, but that each person has his own values. They might even acknowledge

that the principles of the Declaration are the values of a not insignificant number of persons--otherwise known as American citizens. But the proposition that all men are created equal, I maintain, is both descriptive and prescriptive. It describes the situation of man as man and prescribes the end toward which particular men and nations ought to move. In other words, equality is both an Is and an Ought. Man's natural constitution provides the standard for political or social convention. All genuine political reform movements, such as the anti-slavery societies of the last century and the anti-totalitarian movements of this century, are possible only because of the existence of the standards of natural right. Mere moral outrage without knowledge of man's natural constitution--or at least right opinion--is either politically irrelevant or dangerous.

Professor Williams has referred to "the edifying heights of the natural cave." I would suggest that the "heights" for the American regime are edifying in two respects. First, they provide a standard for civil society, as we have seen. But they also provide a standard for a life beyond politics, a life of reason. The use of reason is, of course, indispensable for the good government of the regime. But it is also the means to human happiness. Indeed, it is such an integral part of the good life that it is virtually identical with it. The happy man is reasoning when he is not relaxing or sleeping. This is, or ought to be, the character of academic life. To live is to be happy, to be doing the thing or employing the faculty which is most natural to man. But the necessary condition for such a life is freedom from opinion or dogma, or at least openness to the truth of things; one must escape from the authority of the cave. But one does not escape that cave, one does not become truly

academic, merely by substituting for the dogma of the natural cave the dogma of, say, individual autonomy of the "unnatural" cave. One does not cease to be determined by mere opinion, by the opinion of one's society, merely by asserting one's "self" in confrontation with that society or by following the fashionable but shallow criticisms of that society. One must first understand American society as it understands itself. One must come fully to grips with society before one can transcend it. One cannot know whether society's institutions are flawed until one has at least measured them by the principles of society. But one must reflect on the principles of that society before one can determine if that society deserves to be called good or just. The mere act of reflecting the society as, say, racist or sexist or oligarchic or what have you establishes only that the critic feels strongly about his "values." It does not prove that his principles are good or that they are in harmony with society's or that society's principles are (not) in harmony with the best regime simply. In contrast with this drawing room revolutionary stance, the Declaration of Independence teaches the genuinely revolutionary doctrine that only regimes in accordance with nature, with the nature of man as a reasonable being able to grasp the "laws of nature and of nature's God," can be legitimate or just.

It is in the return to the genuine study of political life, to the quest for the purpose and utility of each and all of the social sciences, to the discovery of the place of our political institutions, policies and ends, to the attainment and enjoyment of an academic life, that one may well find the antidote to instructor apathy and the malaise of the listless college. For ourselves (and our students) there is a veritable feast of insights and lessons to draw upon both for their own sake and for

their practical value.

If most of our students are not charmed by the academic life, by the life of the mind, they can at least learn the principles by which to lead the life of good citizens in a decent regime. Those few who are capable of transcending the cave will be benefitted by the serious and thorough consideration of man's political constitution. Their effort and struggle to understand at the political level will prepare them for the lifelong quest at the level of man's natural constitution.

The American regime's awarness of, or pointing beyond itself to, the situation of man as man, constitutes the greatest and most persuasive argument for its legitimacy. As long as it remains committed to man's natural equality and liberty, it is simultaneously committed to academic freedom. And as such, it is a model for what is or ought to be our way of life as academicians.